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ABSTRACT

Step-by-step instructions and diagrams for 11 traditional folk dances of the southern Appalachian mountain region appropriate for beginners are provided. The dances are grouped into five broad categories: (1) openers, which use a leader to pick up participants as the dance progresses; (2) mixers (Oh, Susannah, Texas Schottische, Gary Gordon's Mixer, Circle Waltz Mixer, and Irish Washerwoman Mixer) in which partners are acquired through exchange or progression; (3) contra dances (Stoke Golding Country Dance, Virginia Reel, and Comical Fellow) performed by couples face to face, line facing line; (4) quadrilles (Ninepins Quadrille) or square dance coming from the highly polished dances of the 18th and 19th century French court; and (5) big set, an adaptation of English, Irish, and Scottish square dances which can include any number of couples divisible by four. A brief history of American folk dancing, a glossary of terms used in the instruction, suggestions for appropriate music and the role of the caller, a 5-item bibliography of folk dance instruction books, and a list of 11 record sources are included. (NEC)

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FOLK DANCES OF THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS:

A BEGINNER'S COLLECTION

By

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FOLK DANCES OF THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS:

A BEGINNER'S COLLECTION

Appalachian Studies Workshop

Berea College

Summer, 1979

Laurie Quint

"The last few years we, in America, seem to be more aware of the value of folk dancing. It is spreading over our countryside as we realize more and more the joy of being part of a group all moving together; as we come to feel the rhythm and beauty of the patterns, and of the folk tunes which enrich and guide them. Folk dances are our own today because they have given satisfaction to many people through many generations. Their roots go far back. Their quality is lasting."

Olive D. Campbell, 1941

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The sources of American folk dancing are as diverse as the origins of the people of the country. Traditionally, dances in early America followed a day's work. Many a quilting bee or corn shucking was concluded with a dance that went on into the night. Other times, a dance was called purely as a social gathering in itself. Whatever the case, the dance was an integral part of the lives of the settlers.

Dancing was usually accompanied by the fiddle, but lack of accompanying music would not prevent a dance. In such a case, hand clapping, foot stomping, or singing would do.

Many religious communities, especially in the southern mountains, frowned on dancing altogether. The preacher (and the congregation if they were faithful) condemned dancing as sinful and the fiddle as an instrument of the devil. Far be it from this to keep the mountaineers from dancing! They just gave dances another name -- "play parties" -- and then played singing games all night instead of dancing.

Dancing has continued in the southern mountains anywhere there have been people to dance. Presently, areas such as Berea College in Kentucky and the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina are centers for persons interested in folk dance, especially of the southern mountains. Several organizations, such as the Country Dance and Song Society of America, sponsor dance camps annually.

Most of the dances of the Appalachian region come from

the British Isles, thus being part of the Anglo-Celtic or Scotch-Irish heritage of the southern mountains. Due to the influences of present day society, however, and the outflux and influx of various peoples to the region, not all dances found in Appalachia today are of such origins.

As an example, one dance found in the southern mountains today is the schottische, of Polish origins. One version danced at Berea College in Kentucky is known as the"Texas Schottische", at that!

This collection, then, does not exclude those dances which are not of direct Appalachian ancestry. All of the dances contained herein, however, have been found (and danced!) in the southern mountains today. The collection is certainly not intended as a scholarly thesis on the dance -- there are plenty of these in print already. It will have served its purpose well if it helps a beginning group to learn a few dances, and more hopefully, to spur them on to further investigation.

GLOSSARY

Contained in the instructions of the dances which follow are several terms which may be unfamiliar to a beginner. These terms are listed and defined below. For more information, see the bibliography.

1. Balance: may be done forward, backward, or to the side. Step left (count 1), touch right to left (count 2). Repeat same movement, beginning right.There is a slight lift of the body as this is done.

2. Ballroom hold: Partners stand face to face. Man's right arm is around woman's waist; woman's left hand rests on man's right shoulder. Man's left and woman's right hands are clasped, with arms extended easily forward.

3. Chassay (Chassé): a sliding step, keeping one foot ahead of the other if moving forward, or keeping one foot to the side of the other if moving sideways -- slide-close, slide-close, etc.

4. Corner: The woman on the man's left; the man on the woman's right.

5. Do-si-do: The man and woman face, pass each other right shoulder to right shoulder, move around each other back to back and return to original position.

6. Gallop: A step followed by a quick close of the other foot.

7. Heel-and-toe: With weight on the opposite foot, place heel of the other foot (counts 1,2), then toe of the other foot (counts 3,4) close to the instep of the foot that has the weight on it. (This is usually done as a heel-and-toe with the left foot, then repeated with the right.)

8. Partner: Woman to the immediate right of man and man to immediate left of woman.

9. Promenade: Partners take hands in the skating position -- that is, right hands in right over left in left, facing counter-clockwise with the man on the inside. Walk around the circle.

10. Reel the set: A figure used in longways dances. Head couple meets in middle of set and hook right elbows, turn once and a half around. Man faces women's line, woman faces men's line. Couple separates and the head man hooks left elbows with second woman in line, head woman hooks left elbow with second man in line and turn once around. Head couple returns to middle of set and hook right elbows, turn once and return to respective lines to swing third dancer. Repeat the reeling action until head couple reaches the foot of the set.

11. Set: The area enclosed by the dancers; the dancers themselves.

12. Side-slip: A step on one foot, and a draw of the other foot up to the first with a shift of weight done quickly. (This is similar to the gallop, but general tempo is slower.)

13. Swing: To turn your partner or opposite once around, clockwise. Types of swing used are two-hand swing, elbow swing, left-hand swing, right-hand swing, and ballroom swing.

14. Two-step: Step left (count 1), close right to left (count 2), step left (count 3), hold (count 4). Usually repeated, beginning right.

15. Waltz: A smooth graceful dance step in even rhythm. Consists of three steps: step forward on the left, step to the side with the right, close left to right, take weight on left.

A word about:

MUSIC

Although live music is much preferred for dancing, the beginning group usually must rely on records. For each dance, I have given a tune that can be used for live performance, and, when able, a record that has this tune. Two recordings in particular contain music suitable for most of these dances. They are:

1. Barn Dance, English Folk Dance and Song Society.
2. Dances from Appalachia, Christmas Country Dance School, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

and are available through the Berea Recreation Extension. (See listing of record sources for address.)

THE LEADER (CALLER)

The leader in most folk dancing calls the set. Much of the pleasure of the dance depends upon his/her skill, good humor, and energy. The leader should keep the dance moving happily. This can be done by giving the calls a little before the dancers are ready to dance them. It is essential that the leader's calls are able to be heard by every dancer.

OPENERS

Music: Done to any good fiddle tune.

Record: Dances from Appalachia, side 1.

Formation: (1)

Leader goes around edge of dance floor, picking up participants and leading them single file around the floor. Leader can then weave in and out of the line -- by going between two people who stop and raise their joined hands to form an arch between them -- being sure to go down the line. The rest of the line follows. When all in the line before those forming the arch have gone through, those two forming the arch turn under and follow the rest, going through arches made by other members of the line.

Formation: (2) (or variation on 1)

Leader picks up participants, then winds the line up into itself, going in smaller and smaller circles. (The line will eventuallly resemble a coil with the leader in the center.) Leader then weaves in and out as before, or can end the opener as is.

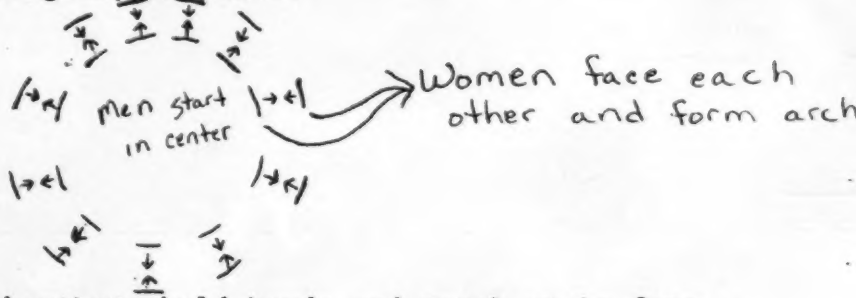
MIXERS

Mixers, being dances in which partners are acquired through exchange or progression, are excellent dances to begin an evening with. They are perfect for groups that are not well acquainted with one another, and in which few or none have danced before.

(1)
Music: Any good fiddle tune.

Record: Dances from Appalachia, side 1.

Formation: Women form two circles, inside women facing out, outside women facing in, in pairs.



Women, facing each other, hold hands and reach up to form an arch. (Pairs are fairly spread out.) Men are standing in the center of the two circles.

Part I — As music starts, men start tunnelling under and through the arches made by the women. When the music stops, women bring their hands down to "capture" the man passing through the arch. Any extra men left over who cannot find two women without a man go to the center again and wait.

Part II — Music starts again: the threesomes promenade with the man in the middle of the women, and elbows hooked. As directed by the caller, the man then swings one partner, then the other.

Part III — When the caller directs them to do so, the two women form an arch again and the men tunnel under once more. Those who were left in the center join in again.

Dance is repeated until the call is given to "Promenade off the floor".

(2)

Dance: Oh, Susannah

Music: This dance can be accompanied by music, but it is also sung effectively.

Formation: Form a big circle, all facing in, women to the right of their partners.

Everybody sing:
1. "Oh I come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee"
Women take a few steps in, a few steps back.

2. "I'm goin to Louisiana, my truelove for to see"
Men do the same.

3. "It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry,
The sun so hot I froze to death, Susannah, don't you cry!"
Everybody face your partner and join right hands. Do a Grand Right and Left, men continuing counter-clockwise, women clockwise. Pass your partner right shoulders without turning around. Give left hand to the next and pass left shoulders. Continue going in this direction, every other hand in turn. Join hands with the person you meet on the word "cry" and promenade counter-clockwise to the chorus:

4. "Oh, Susannah, Oh don't you cry for me,
"For I come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee."
After the Grand Right and Left, if there are extra people, they go to the center until all have partners.

Repeat as often as desired.

(3)

Dance: Texas Schottische

Music: Texas Schottische, Click go the Shears, Allies Reel

Record: Barn Dance, side 2, band 2

Formation: Partners, double circle, all facing counter-clockwise, inside hands joined.

Part I — Moving diagonally forward to the left, both take one two-step, beginning on left foot (step, close, step, pause). Repeat, this time moving diagonally to the right with a two-step.

Part II — Move forward with four walking steps, beginning with left foot.

Part III — Both do a heel-and-toe with left foot, then the woman walks in front of partner with three walking steps, turning around to face her partner. (She can now also see the next man behind him.)
Both do a heel-and-toe with right foot. The woman then turns to her left (partners release hands) as she takes three steps back to the next partner. At the same time, the man takes three steps forward to catch the woman in front.

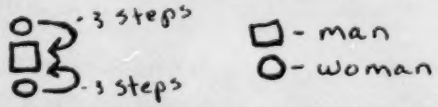
Dance is repeated as often as desired.

Variation: This dance can also be done in threesomes if there are more women present than men.

Formation: Same, except that man is flanked on left and right by two partners.

Part I
Part II — Same as I and II in above.

Part III — All do heel-and-toe with left foot, women then take three steps around and towards the man so they wind up facing him and able to see the next man behind him.
Like so:



All do heel-and-toe with right foot, then women take three steps in towards the man and around so that they are in position to take the next man's hands to start again. The man, as in above, takes three steps forward to take the hands of women in front.

(4)
Dance: Gay Gordon's Mixer

Music: The Meeting of the Waters, Marching Down to Fyvie

Record: Barn Dance, side 1, band 1.

Formation: Partners, double circle, all facing counter-clockwise, inside hands joined.

Part I — Walk forward four steps with partner, starting on outside foot. Both partners make a half towards each other and continue backwards in same direction for four steps.

Part II — Repeat Part I in opposite direction.

Part III — Partners balance sideways to each other two steps and back. Partners then exchange places as woman turns in front of man; partners release hands.

Part IV — Rejoining inside hands, partners balance sideways to each other two steps and back. This time woman turns behind partner and meets man behind him as a new partner; at the same, the man moves forward to meet new partner and the dance continues as before.

(5)
Dance: Circle Waltz Mixer

Music: Any waltz tune (such as Bonny Tyneside, Star of the County Down, Daisy Bell, After the Ball)

Record: Barn Dance, side 1, band 5.

Formation: Partners, all in one big circle, all facing in. Woman to the right of her partner.

Part I — Taking hands, all balance in (to the count of 3), then out. Each man then helps the woman on his left to waltz across to his right.
All this is done four times.

Part II — On the fourth time, each man keeps the woman he has. Taking inside hands, partners sway (turn) in,then out. Dropping hands, they spin away from each other to face away from the circle. Joining inside hands again, they sway out, then in, and spin back, this time to face each other.

Part III — Taking ballroom hold, partners then do two chassays in, then out, then repeat or waltz a little way around the circle and start again in a big circle.

Repeat as often as desired.

Rhythmic Learning Cues may be a helpful tool in learning this dance:

Part I (Balance) In,2,3
Out,2,3
Waltz,2,3,1,2,3
(four times)

Part II (Sway) In,2,3
Out,2,3
Spin,2,3,1,2,3

Out,2,3
In,2,3
Spin,2,3,1,2,3

Part III (Chassay) In,close,3,In,close,3
Out,close,3,Out,close,3
Waltz,2,3,Waltz,2,3,Waltz,2,3,Again.

(6)
Dance: Irish Washerwoman Mixer

Music: Irish Washerwoman

Formation: Partners, all in one big circle, all facing in. Woman to the right of her partner.

Part I "All join hands and into the middle"
(All to the center and join hands.)

Part II "And when you get there keep time to the fiddle"
(Stamp feet 4 times in center.)

Part III "And when you get back remember the call"
(All come back out.)

Part IV "Swing on the corner and promenade all."
(Swing corner round and promenade.)

(Promenade 16 counts and begin again.)

Repeat as often as desired.

CONTRA DANCES

Literally, a contra dance is a dance of opposition: a dance performed by couples face to face, line facing line. Contras, or longways, were the main dances of the people in the British Isles during the seventeeth century. In this country, longways sets are usually associated with New England since that is where they first appeared. With the Scotch-Irish, Anglo-Celtic movement to the southern mountains, these dances naturally followed and are frequently performed there today.

(7)
Dance: Stoke Golding Country Dance

Music: Any brisk, continuous reel(Keel Row, Fairy Dance, Mason's Apron)

Record: English Reels and Country Dances, side 1. (E.M.I. Records)

Formation: Longways for four or five couples, first couple being the "top" and last couples being the "bottom" of the set.

Part I Top man swings bottom woman, crossed hands advised.

Part II Bottom man swings top woman.

Part III Top couple reels the set to the bottom.

Part IV With top man inside and top woman outside the set, they raise hands and go up over the women and around to, then down over the men; when they get back to the bottom, the woman goes right into the swing with the new leading man to start the dance again. (Top couple is now the new bottom couple.)

This is traditionally danced unphrased, the length of swing, etc., being ad lib.

(8)
Dance: Virginia Reel

Music: Virginia Reel, or any brisk reel.

Formation: Longways, for as many couples as will.

Part I (each mvt. 8 counts)
Everybody forward and back.
Turn your partner right hand round.
Turn your partner left hand round.
Turn your partner both hands round.
Everybody do-si-do.

Part II
Head couple join hands, do a side-slip down the center and return.
Once-and-a-half around at the head, and
Reel down the set.

At the bottom of the set, the head couple swings, then goes back up the center of the set.

Part III
The woman leads her line to the right while the man leads his line around to the left. When the head couple gets back around to the bottom, they join hands and form an arch. The lines then follow through and up the center in couples. When all other couples have gone through, the head couple stays where they are to become the bottom couple.

Dance is repeated, with couple #2 now head couple.

(9)
Dance: The Comical Fellow

Music: The Comical Fellow

Record: Dances from the Apted Book (English Folk Dance and Song Society)

Formation: Longways for as many as will, each couple counting off from top as alternately #1 or #2.

Part I The first (#1) man balances forward to the second woman, then retires back to place 4 steps. (8 counts)

Part II The first woman does same to the second man.

Part III Each first (#1) couple goes down the middle 8 steps (8 counts), turns, then skips back to place with crossed hands, and casts off one place (exchanges places with their #2 couple). (8 counts)
All clap 4 times, then turn partners half way round. (8 counts)

Part IV In fours from the top, paired couples circle four, 8 steps clockwise, then 8 steps counter-clockwise.
All clap 4 times, then turn partners half way round. (8 counts)

Dance is repeated.

QUADRILLES

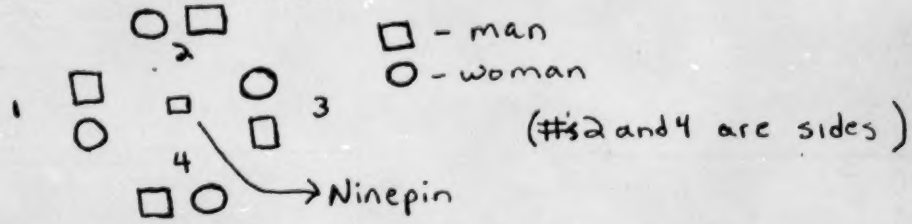
The Quadrille, or Square Dance, comes from the highly polished dances of the eighteenth and nineteenth century French court.

(10)
Dance: Ninepins Quadrille

Music: My Love is but a Lassie Yet, Cock of the North

Record: Barn Dance, side 1, bands 2&3.

Formation: Set of four couples in a square with an extra man in the center as the "Ninepin".



Part I — First and Third couples take ballroom hold, and, keeping to the right, gallop to each other's places. They then turn round and gallop back to their original places. (The Ninepin in the center must dodge them.)

Part II — Sides do the same.

Part III — First and Third couples circle left and round the Ninepin.

Part IV — Sides do the same.

Part V — All couples swing. Ninepin then swings each woman in order (beginning with #1). As the Ninepin swings his partner, each man in order goes to the center and circles right. When the Ninepin has swung all four women, he joins the men to circle right.

Part VI — Music stops suddenly and all five men in the center try to get a partner. Odd man out becomes the next Ninepin.

THE BIG SET

One of the most well known dances from Appalachia is the Big Set. Portions of this dance can be traced to the English country dances, and Irish and Scottish dances as well.

The Big Set was traditionally done as a square dance in a set of four couples. With time, this has changed to the Big Set where any number (divisible by four) may enter.

No collection of dances found in Appalachia would be complete without an example of a Big Set. One very simple version of the Big Set is thus offered on the following pages.

It should be noted here, however, that the Big Set contains many different figures and explanations of these can get more and more complex -- too complex for the nature of this collection. The same holds true for the Kentucky Running Set, similar to the Appalachian Big Set, yet even more detailed and better suited for more advanced dancers.

See the bibliography for more information on the Big Set and the Running Set.

(11)
Dance: Big Set

Music: Any good fiddle or square dance tune can be used. (Sally Goodin, Boil Them Cabbage, Bill Cheatham, Old Joe Clark)

Record: Dances from Appalachia, side 1.

Formation: In partners, woman on her partner's right, all in one big circle. Couples number off, alternately being #1 or #2 couples. (There should be an even number of couples.)

Part I "Circle right -- the other way back"

Part II "Break and swing the lady on your left,
And now your own"
(These directions are given to the men.)

Part III "Promenade"
Couples promenade around the circle, going right (counter-clockwise)

Part IV "London Bridge"
Leading couple (any couple designated by the caller) reverse and form an arch over the next couple, and so on until each couple has gone through the same. Leading couple then reverse and duck under next couple, and so on until each couple is promenading again counter-clockwise.

Big Set, continued

Part V "Ladies stand still and gents move up four" (The number may be varied)
Couples drop hands and women stay in place as men move up four places, then swing that new partner.
"Again Promenade"
All of Part V is repeated until men have almost reached partner and the caller says:
"Ladies stand still, gents find own partners and promenade."

Part VI "Off in fours" (Odd # couples go to even # couples.)
"Right hand across -- left hands back"
All take right hands in the center of their circle of four (to form a "star") and circle left, then reverse with left hands joined.
"Break and swing your opposite"
Man swings his corner.
"Now your own"
Man swings his partner.

Part VII "Odd couples promenade on"
Odd couples move on to next even couple, then

Part VIII "Circle four" (with new couple)
"Bird in a Cage"
Odd woman in center, other three circle around her.
"Bird flies out and owl hops in"
Odd woman out of center, odd man into center, other three circle around him.
"Break and Swing"

Part IX "Odd couples promenade on"

Parts VI-IX can be repeated until the call is given to form one big circle again.

For the final figure, Parts I-IV can be repeated until time to:

Part X "Promenade off the floor"

(The figures in this set were numbered for the sake of convenience and clarity. By no means do they follow this order all of the time.)

Obviously, the dances on the previous pages are but a few of the many found in the southern mountains today. This work is intended to be but a beginning sampler to invite further investigation into the subject.

There are scores of books available that contain more information on dances of the southern mountains, and folk dance in general. The following books are a selected few that were particularly helpful in gathering this collection, and which contain thorough coverage of folk dancing. Aspects of dance not dealt with here, such as facilities, equipment, program planning, tips to the caller, and full glossaries of terms are treated excellently, and notes have been made accordingly after each book.

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Cooperative Recreation Service, Inc., eds. Handy Square Dance Book. Delaware, Ohio, 1955.

Harris, Jane. Dance a While. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1968.
A comprehensive manual in textbook form. Great for teachers.

Napier, Patrick E. Kentucky Mountain Square Dancing. Berea: Berea College, 1975.
The most readily available book on the subject. (Available through the Council of the Southern Mountains Bookstore, Berea, Kentucky, 40403.)

Mynatt and Kaiman. Folk Dancing for Students and Teachers. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1975.
Excellent information on teaching folk dance, from choosing equipment to hints for the teacher. Textbook form.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)

Nevell, Richard. A Time to Dance. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.
Body of the book is not very accurate, but highly recommended for the very excellent catalogue section including bibliography, collection of fiddle tunes, book sources, libraries, archives, recordings and record sources, films, periodicals, organizations, and events.

RECORD SOURCES

(Catalogues are free upon request unless otherwise noted.)

Annie's Front Hall. RD 1 Wormer Road, Voorheesville, New York 12186.
Offers a wide selection of music appropriate for contra dance and southern mountain dance.

Berea College Recreation Extension. Box 287, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, 40403.
Carries several records for southern mountain dance.

Council of the Southern Mountains Bookstore. Berea, Kentucky, 40403.
Catalogue costs $1.

Country Dance and Song Society. 55 Christopher Street, New York, New York, 10014.

English Folk Dance and Song Society. Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, London, NW 1, England.

Folk Dancer Record Service. P.O. Box 201, Flushing, New York.

Folkways Records. 43 West 61 Street, New York, New York 10023

June Appal Records. Box 743, Whitesburg, Kentucky, 42858.

Philo Records, Inc. The Barn, North Ferrisburg, Vermont, 05473.
Selection of American, French Canadian, and Irish artists.

Rounder Records. 186 Willow Avenue, Somerville, Massachusetts, 02114.
Selection of artists from the South, New England, and foreign lands.

Lloyd Shaw Foundation. 1890 Darlee Court, Lakewood, Colorado, 80215.
Good selection of dance records. Also instuctional materials on records.

The spirit and style of southern mountain dancing cannot be captured with pen and ink...One must take part in the figures to appreciate them.

L.Q.